

Eroded Narrative:

The Strata of Coastal Memory and the Materiality of In-Betweenness

By

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Abstract

Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory and the Materiality of In-Betweenness investigates the material and intellectual aspects of diasporic identity, memory, and in-betweenness through painting. The project, which is based on practice-led research, relies on postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, and Third Culture Kid (TCK) discourse to investigate identity as a layered and constantly re-formed phenomenon, rather than a fixed origin or eventual destination. Through the notions of the Third Space¹, border-translation, and the right to opacity², this thesis argues that painting can communicate the complexity of displacement and belonging through material process as well as through representation.

Working primarily with watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on paper, this body of paintings explores how erosion, sedimentation, layering, bleeding, and fixing can generate a visual language of memory. In this perspective, water represents mobility, time and translation, but stone represents memory condensation that resists disappearing. The removal of the horizon line further produces disorientation as a spatial and perceptual strategy, refusing stable overview and linear narratives of migration. Rather than presenting diasporic experience as transparent or totally readable, the work uses opacity as both an ethical and artistic strategy, enabling memory to be fractured, fragmentary, and unresolved.

The thesis exhibition extends these themes into the gallery space, where repeating shapes of coast, stone, blur, and strata are addressed through installation, interval, and spectator interaction. Painting is positioned throughout the thesis not as a representation of theory, but as a technique of inquiry that materializes identity, displacement, and memory . Ultimately,

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994),37.

² Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189-194.

this research proposes that diasporic subjectivity may be understood not as a problem to be resolved, but as a changing coastal stratum that is continually destroyed and rebuilt through time, relation, and material process.

Key Words: Third Space, Border-translation, right to opacity, Third Culture Kid (TCK), materiality, erosion and sedimentation, watercolour, silent performance, condensation of memory

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Introduction

I was born in South Korea and moved to Canada alone when I was sixteen years old. At that time, I was just a teenager looking for a new start, but I did not realize that this move would create a permanent “rift” in how I see the world and myself. Now, having lived in Canada for twelve years—nearly half of my life—I find myself standing in a strange middle ground. In Korea, I am seen as someone who was changed by the West. In Canada, despite my efforts to integrate, I am often reminded that I am a foreigner. This experience of being “everywhere and nowhere” is what shaped the beginning of my research.

For a long time, I tried to make my story clear and easy for others to understand. I felt I had to explain my journey in a straight line: from there to here. However, memory does not work in a linear fashion. My memories of home are not clear pictures; they are more like the coastal landscapes I paint constantly shifting, eroding, and leaving behind thin layers of colour. I realize that my struggle to “belonging” was not a problem to be fixed, but a space to be explored. This was the turning point in my art practice. I stopped trying to paint the “whole view” and started focusing on what is hidden or “blurry.”

In my studio, I began to use watercolour and gouache to evoke the feeling of displacement. When water touches the paper, the pigment bleeds, spreads, and settles in unpredictable ways. This material behaviour became a way for me to think through how identity shifts across borders. I describe this process as “border-translation”, a condition in which movement between places produces not a single stable identity, but a layered and continually changing sense of self. For me, the Third Space is not a physical location, nor should it be equated directly with the psychological state of a Third Culture Kid (TCK), a term coined by Ruth Hill

Useem.³ Although the two concepts are related, they remain distinct. TCK refers to the lived experience of growing up between cultures⁴, while the Third Space, as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha, describes a negotiated in-between condition in which identity is continuously formed and transformed.⁵ In this thesis, TCK experience is not positioned merely as personal context, but as an interpretive framework that structures both the methodology of painting and the reading of the works. My work approaches this in-betweenness not as loss, but as accumulation —what I call strata.

I investigate how the primary visual forms in my work—water and stone—function as material metaphors for the condensation of memory in this project. I explore how the fluidity of water and the hardness of stone coalesce to represent the layered nature of the Third Space. If water represents the twelve years of time flowing by Canada, then the stones in my paintings are the parts of my Korean origin that refuse to be washed away. They are the solid pieces of self that survive the erosion of time.

Therefore, I ask how painting might hold the complex experience of migration without reducing it to a coherent or easily legible narrative through this thesis. Rather than treating identity as fixed, transparent or fully recoverable, I am interested in how painting can register instability, interruption, and persistence at the same time. My work approaches diasporic experience as something materially and affectively layered, shaped by distance, translation, and temporal sedimentation.⁶ Within this inquiry, painting becomes not simply a medium of

³ Ruth Hill Useem and Ann Baker Cottrell, "Adult Third Culture Kids," in *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming 'Home' to a Strange Land*, ed. Carolyn D. Smith (Bayside, NY: Aletheia Publications, 1996), 22-35.

⁴ Ruth Hill Useem and Ann Baker Cottrell, "Adult Third Culture Kids," in *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming 'Home' to a Strange Land*, 22-35.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19-84.

⁶ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222-237.

representation, but a site through which memory, dislocation, and continuity can be negotiated in visual form.

The primary motifs in this thesis water and stone, function as material metaphors through which these concerns are explored. Water evokes movement, erosion, drift, and the passage of time, while stone suggests density, residue, and what resists disappearance. If water reflects the twelve years I have lived in Canada, the stones in my paintings mark those elements of my Korean origin that remain despite distance and transformation. Through the tension between fluidity and solidity, dissolution and endurance, the paintings examine how memory is not merely recalled but condensed, altered, and carried forward.⁷ In this way, the thesis considers how pictorial abstraction can articulate diasporic experience as an ongoing process of negotiation, in which identity is formed through layers of movement, persistence, and partial return.

⁷ Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 163-179.

Chapter 1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter brings together the literature review and theoretical framework to create a more cohesive conceptual foundation for *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory and the Materiality of In-Betweenness*. Rather than isolating the study of scholarship from its application to the thesis, this chapter highlights the essential authors and concepts alongside the ways they inform the project's argument, material logic, and visual tactics. The thesis is situated at the intersection of postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, TCK discourse, phenomenology, visual culture, and practice-based research. Across these disciplines, some similar themes emerge: identity as negotiated rather than fixed, home as relational rather than unique, memory as fractured rather than entirely recovered, and material process as a site of knowledge rather than a secondary vehicle of representation. These scholarly works provide as the conceptual foundation for interpreting the thesis as a visual and material negotiation of in-betweenness, displacement, opacity, and connection, instead of a portrayal of stable identity.

1.1 Third Space, Third Culture Kid Identity, and Diasporic Becoming

A foundational concept for this thesis is Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the Third Space. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that cultural identity is not rooted in an original essence or a stable national belonging, but it is produced through negotiation in an in-between space where meanings are translated and transformed.⁸ The Third Space, therefore provides a critical framework for understanding identity as relational, unstable, and continuously reconstituted rather than singular or fixed. This concept is especially significant for a thesis

⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 40-65.

concerned with diasporic and cross-cultural subjectivity because it resists binary models of identity and instead foregrounds hybridity, liminality and cultural translation.⁹

This approach is made more historically and socially particular through studies on TCK. In "Adult Third Culture Kids," Ruth Hill Useem and Ann Baker Cottrell define Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) as individuals whose formative years were spent across multiple cultural environments.¹⁰ Their work is foundational to TCK discourse because it reveals how repeated relocation experiences may result in complicated and unstable understandings of home, belonging, and selfhood. Rather than being rooted in a single national or geographic origin, identity is formed through adaptation, cultural negotiation, and repeated encounters with diversity.¹¹ In this respect, their perspective resonates strongly with Bhabha's theory of the Third Space, since both frameworks see identity being formed through overlap, translation, and in-betweenness rather than purity or origin.

This discussion is further developed in Helen Fail, Jeff Thompson, and George Walker's study of former international school students, which examines how transnational childhood continues to shape identity and relationships into adulthood.¹² Whereas Useem and Cottrell establish the biographical and developmental conditions of TCK identity, Fail, Thompson, and Walker emphasize its enduring emotional and interpersonal dimensions. Their work reveals that belonging is typically seen as a relational condition shaped by individuals, movement, and moments of recognition rather than as connection to a fixed location.¹³ This divergence

⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 217.

¹⁰ Useem and Cottrell, "Adult Third Culture Kids," in *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming 'Home' to a Strange Land*, 22-35.

¹¹ Useem and Cottrell, "Adult Third Culture Kids," in *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming 'Home' to a Strange Land*, 22-35.

¹² Helen Fail, Jeff Thompson, and George Walker, "Belonging, Identity and Third Culture Kids: Life Histories of Former International School Students," *Journal of Research in International Education* 3, no. 3 (2004): 319-338.

¹³ Fail, Thompson, and Walker, "Belonging, Identity and Third Culture Kids: Life Histories of Former

is especially relevant to the current thesis, which contends that memory does not return as a unified image of a single recovered home, but rather as a layered and fragmented structure composed of movement, distance, and partial connection.

A more critical intervention appears in the work of Danau Tanu's scholarship on transnational childhood and international schooling. Tanu complicates earlier TCK discourse by arguing that cross-cultural mobility should not be treated as a universal, neutral, or inherently enriching experience.¹⁴ Rather, mobility is structured through relations of race, class, nationality, and postcolonial power. This intervention is important since it prevents the thesis from romanticizing cultural in-betweenness as a purely personal condition. Instead, it situates identity formation within uneven historical and political conditions. Tanu builds upon and departs from previous TCK scholarship in this way. She maintains its understanding that internationally mobile childhood creates diverse kinds of subject formation, while insisting that such development must also be understood in terms of the privilege and exclusion mechanisms that determine mobility itself.¹⁵

Diaspora studies contribute to this issue by focusing the political and historical contexts that promote belonging rather than just movement. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah contrasts between "homing desire" and simple or literal return to one's origin.¹⁶ For Brah, diaspora is not defined solely by displacement, but by the ways subjects negotiate attachment, exclusion, memory, and location. Her intervention is especially

International School Students," *Journal of Research in International Education* 3,320.

¹⁴ Danau Tanu, "Unpacking 'Third Culture Kids': The Transnational Lives of Young People at an International School in Indonesia" (PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2013), 21-39.

¹⁵ Tanu, "Unpacking 'Third Culture Kids': The Transnational Lives of Young People at an International School in Indonesia", 23-26.

¹⁶ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 443-446.

important because it resists the assumption that belonging must be resolved through return. Instead, the desire for home persists precisely in situations where home cannot be fully recovered as a singular place.¹⁷ This concept is crucial to the present project, in which home is regarded as an emotive and fractured structure of orientation forming through repetition, memory, and relocation, rather than a fixed geography.

A related but distinct formulation appears in Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Hall argues that identity should be understood not only as "being," tied to shared history and collective memory, but also as "becoming," continuously transformed through history, representation, and power.¹⁸ This phrase is significant because it underlines that cultural identity is continuous production influenced by rupture, difference, and historical change. Hall's work complements Brah's in significant ways: whereas Brah foregrounds diaspora as a sphere of connection, exclusion, and desire, Hall emphasizes on representation and the historical formation of identity through cultural and political processes.¹⁹

Collectively, Bhabha, Useem and Cottrell, Fail, Thompson and Walker, Tanu, Brah, and Hall provide the central conceptual basis through which this thesis understands identity. Identity is not viewed here as single, territorially fixed, or completely cohesive. Rather, it is regarded as negotiated, diasporic, and relational, shaped by overlapping cultural, spatial, and historical contexts. This framework is critical to the study as it allows my own experience to be interpreted not as a divided position between two stable cultures, but as an ongoing process of formation shaped by movement, memory and partial belonging. As a result, my paintings

¹⁷ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, 443-446.

¹⁸ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, 22-237.

¹⁹ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, 222-237.

make no attempt to rebuild home as a singular, transparent vision. Instead, they represent identity as complex, unsettled, and constantly negotiated through fragmentation, opacity, and relation.

1.2 Home, Disorientation, and the Loss of Stable Ground

A second group of literatures provides a framework for thinking about place, perception, and disorientation. This thesis does not see disorientation just as an emotional result of migration or relocation. It is also a spatial and perceptual condition that undermines traditional methods of situating oneself in relation to location. This is notably pertinent to the project's formal techniques, specifically, the removal of the horizon line, which refuses the stable orientation and totalized view commonly associated with landscape depiction. In this approach, the work challenges clear, linear narratives of migration and identity by denying the viewer a properly organized spatial landscape.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is important to this discussion because it emphasizes embodied perception within embodied experience rather than detached visual mastery.²⁰ Space, in this account, is not encountered from an external, controlling position, but through bodily relation, movement, and sensory engagement. This framework is useful for understanding horizonlessness not simply as absence, but as an invitation into another mode of spatial relation. The viewer is not positioned outside the image as a mastering subject, but is instead drawn into uncertainty, proximity and perceptual searching.

²⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 12-42.

Edward Casey's writing on place further supports this perspective by arguing that place is not merely a physical location or abstract container, but an embodied and remembered structure through which experience is organized.²¹ Casey is particularly relevant for this notion because remembered places continue to shape identity even after they are no longer easily accessible. Place exists not only as physical place, but as an emotional and experience coordinate that keeps the self-oriented in the world.²² This is necessary to the project's treatment of memory, since the landscapes to which the work returns are not represented as stable sites of recovery, but as partial and shifting structures of remembrance.

Svetlana Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia adds a temporal dimension to this framework. Rather than treating nostalgia as sentimental restoration, Boym emphasizes ambivalence, distance, ruins, and the incompleteness of return.²³ This is especially relevant to the present thesis because memory is not approached as the recovery of an intact past, but as the persistence of traces, longing, and unresolved attachment. James Elkins contributes a specifically painterly dimension to this discussion by describing how paint can destabilize vision when recognizable imagery dissolves into material substance.²⁴ This account is valuable because it links perceptual instability to the material behaviour of painting itself.

These writings make it possible to understand disorientation as both lived and aesthetic. The loss of stable ground is not just conceptually evident in the work; it is also institutionalized by compositional decisions that deny certainty, orientation, and total visual access. In this

²¹ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1-40.

²² Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 1-40.

²³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 99-107.

²⁴ James Elkins, *What Painting Is* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54.

paper, horizonlessness, unstable pictorial space, and the partial dissolution of form function as ways of thinking through migration, memory, and embodied relationship to place.

1.3 Opacity, Legibility, and the Refusal of Transparent Narrative

A third major body of literature relevant to this thesis concerns opacity and the politics of legibility. A frequent theme in postcolonial and diasporic discourse is the assumption that racialized, migratory, or hybrid subjects will be intelligible, transient, and clearly comprehensible. This demand is especially significant for a painting practice such as mine, in which blur, fragmentation, and unreadability are viewed as purposeful critical strategies rather than communicative failures.

Édouard Glissant's concept of the right to opacity is foundational in this regard. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant argues that individuals do not need to be made fully transparent in order to be recognized or related to.²⁵ He criticizes the Western drive to comprehend and classify the other completely, showing how such comprehensibility is often tied to domination, possession, and reduction. Opacity, in this sense, is not simply obscurity. It is an ethical principle that enables complexity to remain without being reduced to explanatory clarity.²⁶ This structure is especially valuable for present study because it defends selfhood against reduction into a stable, consistent, and consumable narrative.

Trinh T. Minh-ha develops a closely related critique in *Woman, Native, Other*. Trinh resists binary cultural frameworks and critiques the institutional demand for transparency

²⁵ Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189-190.

²⁶ Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Poetics of Relation*, 111-120.

and legibility.²⁷ Her discussion of the “triple bind” demonstrates how racialized women are pressured to become singular, classifiable, and narratively coherent, whereas her critique of the desire to “tell it the way they tell it” reveals how dominant narrative structures impose an external epistemic order upon lived experience.²⁸ These arguments are significant to this thesis because they indicate that indecipherability does not imply a lack of meaning. On the contrary, it might serve as a rejection of capture, simplification, and disciplinary readiness.

When read together, Glissant and Trinh give a solid foundation for understanding opacity as both an ethical and political method. This is crucial to the concept because the work defies the need to make diasporic memory completely readable. Memory in these paintings does not appear to be transparent, comprehensive, or linearly recoverable. It remains fragmentary, complex, and unresolved. Opacity therefore becomes both a conceptual stance and a visual strategy. Blur, interruption, fragmentation, and illegible pictorial space are employed deliberately as formal strategies that support the thesis’s refusal of reductive readability. In this way, the paintings do not distance themselves from meaning, rather, they question the assumption that meaning must exist in an easily digestible form.

1.4 Materiality, Water, and Practice-Led Research

Since this study is grounded in painting, material process cannot be treated as secondary to theory. A fourth strand of scholarship therefore addresses materiality, water, and practice-led research. These texts are essential because they frame materials not as neutral tools, but as active participants in thought, memory, and knowledge production.

²⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 6.

²⁸ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, 141.

Thinking with Water, edited by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis is especially important in that it approaches water not as a passive object of representation, but as a way of thinking linked to migration, ecology, memory, and relation.²⁹ This is central to the thesis, as water is not only depicted in the paintings; it also structures the process of making. The movement of water across paper, the bleeding and settling of pigment, and the unstable relation between control and diffusion all become conceptual as well as visual operations. Water enables identity to be imagined not as a fixed form, but as fluid, contingent, and mobile.

Tim Ingold's writing on the "life of materials" further supports this framework by rejecting the idea that artists impose form upon inert matter.³⁰ Instead, making unfolds through participation in material flows and forces. This is especially relevant to a practice grounded in watercolour, gouache, staining, bleeding, and layering, where the work emerges through negotiation with the medium rather than under total control. Barbara Bolt's *Art Beyond Representation* is equally important because it argues that art-making itself can function as a mode of inquiry.³¹ Practice-led research does not merely illustrate pre-existing theory. It generates knowledge through process. This claim is further supported by writing on art and memory that suggests art may perform memory rather than simply reflect it.³²

These arguments are crucial to the thesis because they enable painting to be understood as research-creation. Formal processes such as bleeding, sedimentation, blurring, layering,

²⁹ Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis, eds., *Thinking with Water* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 3-22.

³⁰ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 19-32.

³¹ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 87-122.

³² Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, 163-179.

and fixing are not merely aesthetic decisions. They are conceptual operations through which the work thinks. This is where the thesis's concern with border-translation becomes especially significant: when water touches paper, pigment spreads, shifts, and settles, much like identity under conditions of border-crossing and cultural negotiation. In this framework, the studio becomes a site where theory is enacted materially rather than illustrated from a distance. Painting functions here as a silent performance in that it enacts memory without resolving it into explicit narrative or speech. Rather than narrating experience directly, the work stages memory through gesture, layering, erasure, and repetition, allowing meaning to emerge materially and visually rather than discursively. The performance is "silent" not because it is empty or quiet, but because it resists declarative explanation by retaining memory in a register of partiality, emotion, and opacity. Painting becomes a space where memory is condensed, displaced, and re-formed through the intertwined process of making and viewing.

Within this material logic, water and stone become more than symbolic motifs. Water corresponds to movement, permeability, erosion, and translation, while stone corresponds to density, retention, condensation, and resistance to disappearance. These elements therefore operate not only iconographically, but also conceptually, through the physical procedure of painting itself.

1.5 Artistic Precedents: Memory, Displacement, and Fragile Forms of Home

The conceptual and formal concerns of this thesis are informed by a group of artists whose practices engage home, displacement, and memory through material and spatial strategies rather than through direct narrative alone. These precedents are significant not because they offer a singular model to be followed, but because they demonstrate how migration and

belonging can be articulated through architecture, moving image, paper, surface, and serial form. Their works make clear that home is not only a subject to be represented, but can also be approached as a fragile structure of perception, memory, and material relation.

Do Ho Suh's work is an important precedent because it reimagines home as something portable, permeable, and spatially reconstructed. In *Home within Home within Home within Home within Home*, a large-scale fabric installation created for MMCA, domestic architecture is rendered as a nested and traversable structure, allowing the viewer to move through an embodied memory of habitation rather than merely observe it from a distance.³³ This treatment of home as transportable and layered is especially relevant to this thesis, which likewise approaches belonging as something formed across locations rather than anchored in a single fixed site. At the same time, my work departs from Suh's practice in a significant way. Suh's fabric architectures retain the legibility of thresholds, corridors, and interiors; they preserve the recognisable outline of dwelling even when displaced.³⁴ By contrast, my paintings do not reconstruct home as a navigable structure. Instead, they approach it through erosion, fragmentation, and atmospheric disorientation. Where Suh often gives the viewer a permeable architecture of memory, I move toward a pictorial field in which memory appears only partially, as sediment, interval, and unstable trace.

Minouk Lim offers a more critical and politically charged precedent for thinking about opacity, interruption, and the instability of public memory. In works such as *New Town Ghost*

³³ National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, "Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home," *MMCA*, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.mmca.go.kr/eng/exhibitions/exhibitionsDetail.do?exhId=201311050000101>.

³⁴ National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, "Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home."

and *S.O.S.—Adoptive Dissensus*, urban transformation, displacement, and collective trauma are presented not through transparent documentary language, but through fragmentation, performance, moving viewpoints, and discontinuous image sequences.³⁵ In *New Town Ghost*, for example, a poet performs from a moving truck through redevelopment zones in Seoul, so that the experience of loss is mediated through motion, distance, and interruption rather than stable narration.³⁶ In *S.O.S.—Adoptive Dissensus*, the juxtaposition of staged encounters, river cruise imagery, concrete infrastructure, and protest scenes produces a fractured visual field in which social memory remains unsettled and only partially accessible.³⁷ This is especially important to my own project because it offers a concrete artistic model for thinking about opacity not as obscurity for its own sake, but as an ethical refusal of total legibility. Lim's work does not allow the viewer immediate explanatory mastery; instead, it requires a sustained encounter with fragments, shadows, and unresolved relations. My paintings share this investment in partial readability, though they do so through pictorial means rather than through video or performance. Blur, layered marks, and the removal of stable spatial anchors serve a similar function in my work, resisting the demand that diasporic experience be rendered as a single coherent story.

Zarina provides another important precedent through her spare yet deeply affective treatment of home as fragment. Her *Home Is a Foreign Place*, a portfolio of thirty-six woodcuts with letterpress, translates memory into a sequence of reduced forms and words:

³⁵ KADIST, "New Town Ghost," collection page, accessed April 3, 2026, <https://kadist.org/work/new-town-ghost/>.

³⁶ Walker Art Center, "S.O.S.-Adoptive Dissensus," collection page, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://walkerart.org/collections/artworks/s-o-s-adoptive-dissensus>.

³⁷ Camille LeFevre, "Documenting the Almost-Real," *Mn Artists*, June 21, 2012, accessed April 6, 2026, <https://mnartists.walkerart.org/documenting-the-almost-real>.

door, threshold, courtyard, road, language, darkness.³⁸ Rather than reconstructing the house in full, Zarina breaks it into discrete and resonant elements, allowing home to emerge as a dispersed structure of recollection. This serial and fragmentary method is especially relevant to my study, since my work also resists the idea that memory can be recovered as a complete image. Zarina's use of paper is equally significant. The delicacy of the support and the economy of line give her work a sense of vulnerability that parallels the emotional instability of exile and return. Despite this, my project diverges from Zarina in both medium and affective register. Where Zarina condenses home into precise graphic signs and linguistic residues, I approach memory through wash, bleed, and layered abstraction. Her works often hold memory in tension through restraint and compression; mine allow it to expand, dissolve, and sediment across the pictorial surface. Even so, both practices understand home less as a stable location than as something reconstructed through partial traces.

Vija Celmins is a crucial precedent for the treatment of stones and water not as illustrative motifs, but as sites of sustained visual thinking. In *To Fix the Image in Memory*, Celmins made bronze casts of eleven rocks and painted them so carefully that they closely resemble the original stones.³⁹ The work unsettles distinctions between original and copy, object and image, observation and recollection. What appears at first to be an exercise in exactitude becomes, more profoundly, an inquiry into memory's relation to material form: how does one hold an image in mind, and what happens when repetition produces both intimacy and uncertainty? This is particularly relevant to my own use of stones as "condensations of memory." Like Celmins, I do not treat stones merely as symbols appended to a narrative.

³⁸ Aparna Kumar, "Notes on a Fragment: Zarina's Dividing Line," *Art History* 47, no. 2 (April 2024): 246–279, <https://doi.org/10.1093/arthis/ulae015>.

³⁹ Anne Jodoin, "Review of [Vija Celmins: *To Fix the Image in Memory*]," *Espace*, no. 123 (2019): 97–98.

Rather, they become dense visual forms through which duration, pressure, and persistence can be thought. However, my approach departs from Celmins's near-forensic precision. In my paintings, stones remain entangled with water, erosion, and diasporic feeling; they are less discrete objects of observation than unstable carriers of memory within a shifting field. Celmins's attention to surface and repetition nonetheless offers an important precedent for understanding how memory can be negotiated through close looking rather than explicit narration.

These precedents show that questions of home and displacement need not be addressed through narrative representation alone. They may instead be articulated through permeability, fragmentation, seriality, blur, repetition, and the instability of surface. Positioned alongside these practices, *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory* does not attempt to reconstruct home as a coherent place or to resolve identity into a stable form. Rather, it approaches memory as something eroded, accumulated, and only partially recoverable. Within this framework, painting becomes a material process through which fragile belonging, cultural translation, and the persistence of what remains can be negotiated without being fully resolved.

Chapter 2. Methodology and Studio Practice

The methodology and studio practice that structure *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory and the Materiality of In-Betweenness* provided the foundation for this project. This chapter examines how the central ideas of coastal memory, materiality, opacity, displacement, and in-betweenness are enacted through painting practice. The project adopts a practice-led research approach in which knowledge is produced not only through theoretical analysis, but also through the embodied and material procedures of making. In this study, painting functions as a mode of inquiry. The studio becomes a site where questions of identity, memory, translation, and belonging are tested through water, pigment, paper, canvas, and repetition.

In-betweenness is not treated here only as a cultural or biographical condition. It is also developed as a material and formal condition within the work. This becomes visible through the lamination and mounting of paper, the repetition of marks, the layering of translucent washes, and the visualization of strata across the pictorial surface. These processes allow the paintings to hold multiple states at once: fragility and support, absorption and resistance, movement and stillness, memory and erosion. Paper carries a particular significance in this project because of its relationship to Korean painting traditions, where works are often produced on paper and where the surface remains closely tied to absorption, touch, and the movement of water-based media. At the same time, my practice also responds to the Canadian contemporary art context, where canvas often functions as a familiar support for painting. By moving between paper and canvas, and by sometimes bringing these supports into relation through mounting or lamination, the work articulates in-betweenness through material structure itself.

This movement between material contexts parallels my own position between cultures, languages, and places of belonging. The paper does not simply become canvas, and the surface in which different histories of making coexist without being fully resolved into one another without completely covering what came before, while each wash settles, stains, or recedes into the next. In this way, strata become both a visual form and a method of thinking. They make visible how memory accumulates unevenly, how belonging is built through partial attachments, and how diasporic identity is formed through overlapping rather than unified structures.

Rather than treating materials as neutral supports for pre-existing ideas, this thesis approaches them as active participants in thought. The project proceeds through the terms border-translation, silent performance, condensation of memory, and erosion and sedimentation. These are not simply poetic descriptions of the finished works. They are methodological concepts that organize how the work is made and how it generates meaning. The chapter therefore focuses on five interrelated aspects of the studio practice: practice-led research, border-translation as method, painting as silent performance, the material relation between water and stone, and the construction of horizonless pictorial space. Through these methods, in-betweenness is not only represented as a theme: it is materially produced through the repeated acts of layering, absorbing, mounting, marking, and eroding.

2.1 Practice-Led Research and Research-Creation

This thesis is based on a practice-led research methodology. In this approach, knowledge emerges through the act of making rather than being applied to the artwork only after the fact. Barbara Bolt's *Art Beyond Representation* is especially important to this chapter because it argues that artistic production can itself function as research. Bolt rejects the assumption

that art merely illustrates already formed concepts and instead positions making as a performative and epistemic act. This viewpoint is critical to the thesis, since the paintings are not conceived as visual translations of a completed theoretical argument. Rather, the argument develops through studio experimentation with material, process, and form.

This approach also aligns with the project's framing as research-creation. The work does not separate conceptual thinking from studio labour. Instead, the relation between the two is reciprocal. Theory shapes the direction of the material investigations, while those investigations generate new conceptual understanding. In this sense, the studio operates as an analytic space. Questions such as how identity shifts across borders, how memory resists transparency, or how disorientation may be visualized are not answered through language alone. Instead, they are explored through the behaviour of watercolour on paper, through layering and erasure, and through the tension between fluid and fixed mark-making.

The importance of this methodological position is explicitly states in the claim that "painting as a methodology" opens the possibility of border-translation and enables the research to investigate in-betweenness through material processes. This phrasing is significant insofar as it places painting at the centre of inquiry, not at its margins. Meaning therefore emerges not only through iconography or subject matter, but through the procedures of layering, bleeding, fixing, blurring, and sedimenting that structure the studio process.

2.2 Border-Translation as Studio Method

A central methodological term in this thesis is border-translation. Border-translation is described through the movement of pigment on paper: when water touches the surface, colour spreads, bleeds, disperses, and settles. This process is understood as materially

analogous to identity shaped through migration and cultural negotiation. Border-translation therefore names both a visual effect and a conceptual method. It describes how identity may move across cultural boundaries without becoming fully detached from its prior traces.

The methodological importance of this concept lies in its refusal of rigid boundaries. Rather than representing cultural identity as the coexistence of two fixed and separate terms, border-translation emphasizes permeability, contact, and residue. Watercolour is especially suited to this method since it does not strictly adhere to fixed bounds. Pigment moves over the paper, resulting in stains, gradients, bleeds, and deposits. This movement, however, does not completely eliminate difference; it leaves traces, sediments, and accumulations. In methodological terms, this allows the studio process to model identity as a condition of movement and retention at the same time.

The concept is supported by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis's *Thinking with Water*, which proposes water as a critical and conceptual medium for thinking about connection, embodiment, ecology, and movement across borders. Rather than treating water as a passive object of representation, they understand it as a mode of thought through which migration, memory, and interconnection can be materially and conceptually apprehended.⁴⁰ For this thesis, water functions not only as a depicted subject but also as an active material condition within the painting process. Its capacity to spread, pool, blur, and leave residue shapes a studio practice based on mobility, instability, and transformation. By working with these behaviours rather than controlling them entirely, the paintings register identity and memory as shifting, relational, and materially unresolved.

Border-translation also clarifies why the paintings avoid sharply bounded forms or overly

⁴⁰ Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis, *Thinking with Water*, 3-22.

descriptive realism. If identity is constituted through negotiation and sedimentation, then painting must remain open to flux, blur, and re-formation. The method therefore privileges process-based image construction over fixed outlines. Translation is enacted materially through diffusion, layering, and partial retention. This gives the studio process a direct conceptual relation to the thesis's arguments about hybridity, in-betweenness, and diaspora.

2.3 Silent Performance and the Temporality of Painting

A second key methodological concept developed in this thesis is what I describe as *silent performance*. By this term, I refer to the way painting enacts the condition of the Third Space not through spoken narrative or theatrical display, but through an embodied, durational, and iterative material process.⁴¹ In this sense, painting operates as a process of remembering, in which memory, displacement, and relation are performed through repeated acts of layering, gesture, and revision. *Silent performance* thus refers to a nonverbal mode of enactment through which these conditions materialized in the act of painting itself.

This concept is supported by Ernst van Alphen's *Art in Mind*, which argues that art performs memory rather than merely reflects it.⁴² This point is methodologically vital because it shifts attention from representation to enactment. Memory in this project is not treated as a fixed image that the artist retrieves and reproduces. Instead, memory is understood as something performed through repetition, hesitation, searching, layering, and revision. The viewer's encounter may also become performative, particularly when horizonlessness and unreadable areas require a process of visual searching rather than immediate recognition.

⁴¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 36-39.

⁴² Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, 163-179.

The temporal dimension of silent performance is crucial. The paintings do not emerge in a single, direct gesture. Instead, they are built slowly through the accumulation of washes, the drying of surfaces, the return to earlier layers, and the alternation between liquid and resistant media. This duration matters methodologically because it mirrors the thesis's understanding of identity as sedimented rather than instantaneous. The work's temporality is therefore not incidental; it is one of the means through which memory and in-betweenness are materially articulated.

The phrase "silent performance" also captures the tension between visibility and withholding. The act of painting records movement and decision, but it does not fully disclose its meanings in declarative language. This aligns with the thesis's commitment to opacity. The method allows painting to hold complexity without translating all experience into verbal or narrative clarity. In this respect, silent performance functions as both a studio method and a critical position.

2.4 Water, Stone, and the Material Construction of Memory

The studio practice is materially organized around the relationship between water and stone. These function as the project's primary conceptual-material poles. Water is associated with the fluid, eroding process of twelve years in Canada, while stones are described as "condensations of memory" that resist disappearance. This opposition is not absolute, but relational: water suggests movement, dispersal, and time, while stone suggests density, retention, and survival. Together, they provide the material language through which the thesis thinks memory.

This relation is reinforced by Tim Ingold's account of the "life of materials." Ingold argues that making is not a matter of imposing fixed form on passive substance; rather, it unfolds

through engagement with the tendencies and movements of materials themselves.⁴³ This is especially relevant to a studio practice that relies on the unpredictable behaviour of watercolour and gouache. Water is allowed to move, pool, stain, and dry according to the conditions of the paper and the quantity of pigment. Such behaviour is not treated as an accident to be eliminated. It is part of the work's methodology because it introduces contingency, delay, and non-total control into the image-making process.

Against this movement, coloured pencil and denser pigment applications perform a different operation. They hold, compress, sharpen, and fix. This contrast is described clearly: the process lets water move as a figure for time and displacement, then fixes it with coloured pencil as a figure for the condensation of memory. This is methodologically important because it structures the paintings around the tension between erosion and retention. The image does not resolve into either pure fluidity or complete stability. Instead, it remains suspended between dispersal and resistance.

The use of paper is equally significant. Zarina describes paper as a material capable of carrying fragility, displacement, and the instability of home. Although Zarina is discussed more fully elsewhere as an artistic precedent, the relevance here is methodological: paper is not simply a support, but a vulnerable surface that records staining, absorption, and pressure. Working on paper therefore intensifies the thesis's concern with memory as trace and with home as fragile rather than secure.

Collectively, water, pigment, pencil, and paper form a system of material thinking. They allow the work to construct memory not as archive, but as residue, accumulation, and

⁴³ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, 19-32.

weathering. Methodologically, this means that memory is produced in the image through the interaction between materials, not merely represented by symbolic motifs.

2.5 Horizon Removal and Spatial Disorientations

Another central methodological decision in this thesis is the removal of the horizon line. The abstract identifies this gesture as central to the investigation, describing it as a refusal of the “total view” and a challenge to the viewer’s desire for a clear, linear immigrant narrative. In methodological terms, horizon removal is not simply a formal choice. It is a compositional strategy that structures how the image is built and how the viewer is invited to engage with it.

In traditional landscape painting, the horizon often stabilizes the picture by providing orientation, depth, and a coherent relation between earth, sea, and sky. By removing this anchor, the paintings withhold immediate spatial certainty. The pictorial field becomes harder to map, and the surface no longer offers the assurance of a fixed standpoint. This methodological choice aligns with the thesis’s broader conceptual interest in disorientation. It creates a spatial condition in which space is felt through ambiguity, immersion, and proximity rather than mastered through overview. This strategy also directly affects the studio process. Without a horizon, composition cannot rely on conventional landscape hierarchy. Instead, the surface is built through strata, zones, and accumulations of mark. Spatial depth emerges through material relation rather than perspective alone. This allows the work to resist narrative illustration and to foreground atmosphere, fragmentation, and perceptual uncertainty.

Alongside horizonlessness, the paintings deploy negative space as a distinct visual strategy for addressing in-betweenness. Unpainted passages and open areas of paper are not

incidental voids but deliberate marks of absence. They figure the gaps, silences, and unrecoverable losses that structure diasporic experience: the relationships, languages, and belongings left behind, and the parts of the self that could not be carried across the border. This absence is not emptiness. It is a weighted interval. It holds the pressure of what is missing without attempting to fill it, allowing the void to remain meaningfully present rather than accidentally blank. In this way, negative space performs my in-between condition: a self shaped as much by what has been left behind as by what has been accumulated.

Incompleteness operates as a related formal commitment. Edges are allowed to remain unresolved, forms trail off before arriving at definition, and areas of the pictorial field refuse conclusion. This withholding is methodologically deliberate. The unfinished mark resists the pressure to produce a coherent, fully legible account of diasporic experience and insists instead on the partial, the provisional, and the still-becoming. Where a completed form might imply a resolved subject, incompleteness holds the image in the condition of in-betweenness itself. The form is neither fully one thing nor another, neither entirely here nor entirely gone. This is not compositional negligence; it is an ethical refusal of closure that mirrors my own unresolved position between cultures, languages, and places of belonging.

Drips and descending runs of pigment add another layer of visual instability to the surface. When watercolour descends across the paper under the force of gravity, it makes time, movement, and the unpredictability of the material visible within the image. These gestural traces are retained rather than corrected. They record the moment when my control gives way to the behaviour of liquid on an absorbent surface. In this sense, the drip becomes a mark of presence: not mastery, but movement; not authority, but the evidence of my hand working through uncertainty. For a practice concerned with in-betweenness, the drip is especially

resonant. It belongs neither entirely to intention nor to accident, neither fully to my will nor to the surface's resistance. It shows the tension between what I try to control and what I allow the material to do. This tension reflects my position as an in-between subject, shaped by culture, memory, and the process of making.

Blurred and dissolved edges form a fourth visual strategy through which the paintings express in-betweenness on the surface itself. In these works, coastline, water, and atmosphere do not appear as clearly separated zones. Instead, their boundaries soften and dissolve through gradual, indeterminate washes. Water seems to bleed into sky, and the shore appears to merge with the sea. This formal dissolution reflects my understanding of cultural in-betweenness not as a movement between two fixed and clearly defined places, but as an ongoing experience of living within a threshold. The edge does not clearly announce itself; it slowly disappears. By interrupting the expected continuity between water and horizon, or between water and shore, the paintings refuse a stable sense of spatial orientation. Rather than confirming where one zone ends and another begins, the image creates a field in which different areas overlap, merge, and remain unresolved. In this way, the absence of the horizon is extended across the entire pictorial surface. Spatial uncertainty is not located only in the removal of a single line, but is distributed throughout the image. Taken together, negative space as absence, incompleteness, drips, and dissolved edges create a visual language of the in-between. These strategies refuse a total view, a fully resolved form, and a completely controlled gesture. Instead, they hold the work in a partial, uncertain, and searching state.

In this way, horizonlessness becomes methodologically inseparable from opacity: both withhold total clarity and require the viewer to remain in a state of partial relation to the image.

2.6 Repetition, Layering, and the Formation of Strata

A final methodological feature of the studio practice is the use of repetition and layering to build what the thesis calls strata. The term “strata” is central to the project’s title and conceptual language. It describes not only geological accumulation, but also the layered formation of memory and identity over time. Strata is produced through repeated application, revision, and partial covering. Washes are laid down, absorbed, altered, and reworked. Traces remain even when earlier layers are obscured. This process gives the image a temporal thickness that corresponds to the thesis’s understanding of identity as sedimented.

Layering is methodologically important because it resists singular origin. No mark appears as wholly primary; each is conditioned by what lies beneath it and by what may later be added over it. This gives the painting a structure analogous to the thesis’s understanding of identity as relational and cumulative. The image is never simply built from blankness to completion. It develops through accretion, interruption, and reformation.

Repetition also allows motifs such as sea, stone, blur, and edge to function less as isolated symbols than as recurring forms of inquiry. The coastline returns because it provides a threshold image through which contact, erosion, and instability can be repeatedly tested. Stones recur because they condense the themes of survival, weight, and retention. Through repetition, the practice becomes a site in which visual language is refined not toward closure, but toward increased density and resonance.

The practice adopts a practice-led research approach in which painting functions as a mode of inquiry. Through the concept of border-translation, the behaviour of water and pigment

becomes a material analogy for cross-cultural negotiation. Through silent performance, painting is understood as a durational enactment of memory rather than as a simple representation of it. Through the relation between water and stone, the work constructs memory as both fluid and condensed, eroded and resistant. Through the removal of the horizon line and the layering of strata, the studio process generates disorientation, opacity, and spatial instability as formal conditions of viewing.

Chapter 3. Exhibition and Works Analysis

3.1 *Eroded Narrative* as Thesis Exhibition

The exhibition *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory* functions as the spatial culmination of the thesis's central concerns: diasporic identity, disorientation, opacity, materiality, and the condensation of memory. The exhibition is grounded in a practice-led investigation of "in-betweenness" through erosion, sedimentation, water, stone, and the refusal of transparent narrative. The exhibition therefore does not simply present a collection of individual paintings. Rather, it creates a relational context in which these concepts are distributed across the gallery as an embodied visual field.



Figure 1. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory*, 2026. Photo by artist.

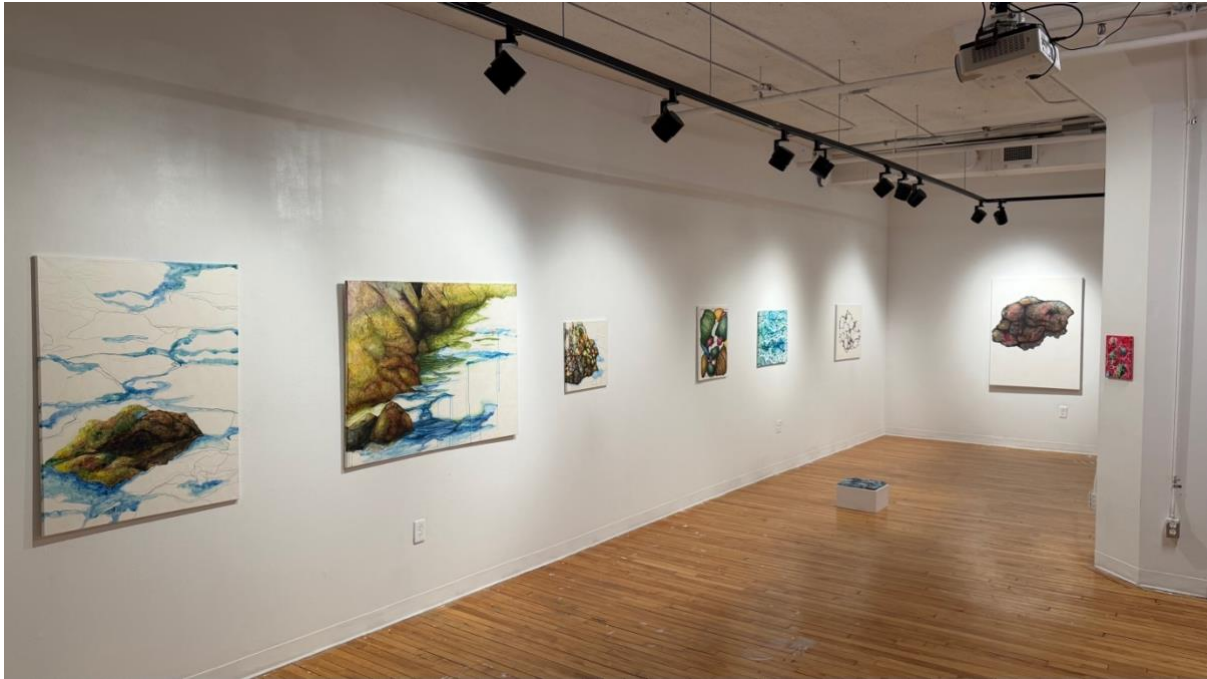


Figure 2. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory*, left side from the window, 2026. Photo by artist.

The installation shows a bright, open gallery with white walls, wooden floors, and track lighting, with the paintings spaced far apart. A small white pedestal is positioned at the centre of the space, while a larger concentration of works spreads along the outer walls. This arrangement creates an environment that is neither densely immersive nor conventionally linear. Instead, the exhibition unfolds through spacing, pause, and shifting proximity. The viewer is invited to move gradually from one visual register to another: from seascape-derived paintings to stone forms, from fluid blue passages to dense clustered stones, and from suspended wall works to the low sculptural intervention in the centre of the room.

This spatial structure is significant because it mirrors the thesis's overall notion that identity is neither unitary, unified, or instantly transparent. The exhibition does not have a single master image that summarizes the project. Instead, it shows a field of fragments, recurrences, and accumulations. Stones, water lines, clustered circular formations, degraded coastline surfaces, and blurred spatial transitions arise and resurface through the space at varying

scales and densities. In this sense, the exhibition performs what the abstract refers to as a “strata”. Identity is perceived as layered, distributed, and materially sedimented rather than as a fixed or wholly transparent.

The exhibition expands the idea of TCK identity as a tangible accumulation of traces rather than a loss of location. Rather than organizing the works according to a fixed narrative sequence, the installation produces a visual cartography of incomplete relationships. The preceding work does not explain the following. Instead, each painting provides a unique modulation of erosion, condensation, and border-translation. The exhibition functions as a spatialized field of memory in which recurrence and discontinuity operate together.

3.2 Installation Logic and Spatial Reading

The installation of *Eroded Narrative* depends on spacing, interval, and relational viewing. The exhibition photographs show that the works are not grouped in a packed salon-style arrangement, but rather with room to breathe. This negative wall space is significant as it stops the exhibition from being read too quickly as a continuous narrative, instead creating gaps between works. The absence of wall labels reinforces this effect, contributing to a free-floating sense of openness and allowing the spatial intervals to stay conceptually active rather than didactic. These pauses are valuable because they reflect the thesis’s emphasis on opacity and partiality: what is not shown, not directly linked, or not completely explained forms part of the exhibition’s interpretive structure.



Figure 3. Chaewon Gim, installation view showing a spatial grouping of *기억의 선별*; *Blank, Shift, Choice*, 2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 24 × 20 in. (top left); *영원한 이주*; *Flow, Home, Move*, 2025. Watercolour and gouache on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas (top right); and *고요한 군집*; *Hush, Mass, Cluster*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 12 × 12 in. (ground centre). Photo by artist.

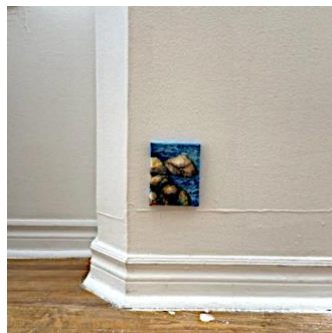


Figure 4. Chaewon Gim, *한 뼉의 꿈*; *Hand, Dream*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on

Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 4 × 5 in. Installed low near the floor and corner edge. Photo by artist.

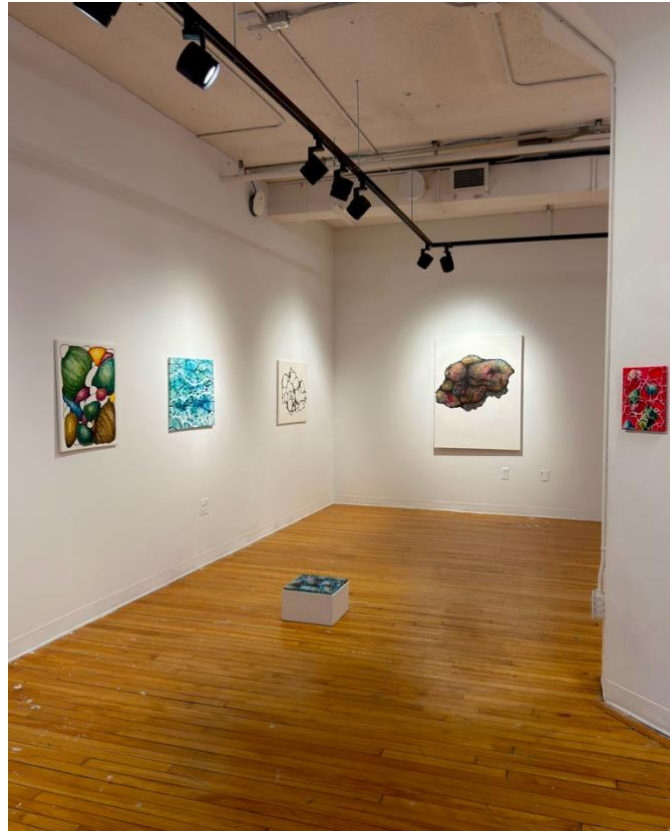


Figure 5. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory*, 2026. Photo by artist.



Figure 6. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *몽환; Reverie, Floating*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 10 x 8 in. Photo by artist.



Figure 7. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *고요한 군집*; *Hush, Mass, Cluster* placed on the exhibition floor, 2025, watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 12 x 12 in. Photo by artist.

Spatially, the exhibition operates through several intersecting tendencies rather than a single linear arrangement. One is a lateral spread across the walls, especially in the long gallery view, where multiple paintings extend from one end of the space to the other. In these views, no single work dominates; rather than, the eye moves rhythmically across shifts in scale, colour temperature, and compositional density. A second tendency is centripetal: attention is periodically drawn inward by the pedestal work, *고요한 군집*; *Hush, Mass, Cluster*, placed on the floor, which interrupts the otherwise wall-based experience and redirects perception toward a lower register. This movement from wall to floor is notable because it expands the exhibition beyond a purely frontal viewing model, requiring the viewer to navigate not only images on the wall but also an object-like form situated within the walking path.

This spatial logic is compounded by two specific locations. The little red painting, *몽환*; *Reverie, Floating*, mounted atop the column, creates another spatial inflection. Since it is placed on an architectural surface rather than a continuous wall, it reads less as part of a seamless sequence and more as a moment of interruption or lateral echo, activating the column itself as part of the exhibition structure. Similarly, the painting installed low between the windows disrupting the typical eye-level logic of display. Its small size and unconventional

positioning result in a more personal and easily ignored encounter, enabling a method of looking focused on search, approach, and bodily adjustment rather than quick intelligibility. These placements result in a more dispersed and interconnected spatial experience, with viewing affected by interruption, redirection, and body movement through the gallery.



Figure 8. Chaewon Gim, *한 뼚의 꿈*, *Hand, Dream*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 4 × 5 in. Installation view, hung on a column between two windows, 2026. Photo by artist.



Figure 9. Chaewon Gim, close-up view of *한 뼚의 꿈*, *Hand, Dream*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 4 × 5 in. Installed on a column between two windows in *Eroded*

Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory, 2026. Photo by artist.



Figure 10. Chaewon Gim, close-up view of *한 뼚의 꿈*; *Hand, Dream*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 4 × 5 in. Installed on a column between two windows in *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory*, 2026. Photo by artist.



Figure 11. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *유실*; *Lost, Fade, Gone*, 2026. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 24 × 30 in. (left), and *개인의 지층*; *Inner, Time, Stack*, 2026. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 48 × 36 in. (right). Photo by artist.

The corner installation creates a strong interaction between two states of being. On the left, the *유실*; *Lost, Fade, Gone*, uses fine dots to create a sensation of emptiness and the fading nature of memory. In contrast, *개인의 지층*; *Inner, Time, Stack*, on the right reflects the condensation of those memories—a dense, tangible accumulation emerging from the entire creative process of this exhibition.

The exhibition is organized around recurring themes rather than a predetermined order. Coastal and stone elements of diverse kinds appear throughout the room. Some compositions resemble recognized sea scapes references, while others move toward abstraction and fragmentation. Moving across the space allows viewers to compare many shapes and see how the same idea evolves throughout the collection.

3.2 Selected Works: Stones, Water, and Strata

The exhibition's central relation between water and stone is not only symbolic but also materially constructed. Water does not signify time simply because it is named as such, and stone does not signify memory merely through metaphor. Rather, these meanings emerge through the behaviour of paint itself: watery passages spread, thin out, and soften at the edges, while lithic forms gather through denser pigment, repeated contouring, and compressed clustering. Boundaries are neither fixed nor fully erased; they are repeatedly formed, crossed, and reconstituted through the material process of painting.

This material relationship is rooted in my repeated return to bodies of water. When I feel exhausted or need to be refreshed, I often go to the water. The sound of waves is repetitive, but never exactly the same, and this rhythm gives me a sense of calm. In 2022, while sitting by the sea at Janghohang in Samcheok, South Korea, I began to understand this coastal scene as more than a landscape. Looking at the movement of the water and the presence of the stones, I felt that the sea could stand for the self, while the stones could stand for my memories. The sea's movement suggested instability, change, and continuation, while the stones held a sense of weight, duration, and accumulation. This moment became an important starting point for my paintings exploring diaspora and in-betweenness.

The photograph included here records the coastal rock formation and tidal pool at Janghohang. It is not used as a direct model to be reproduced. Rather, it functions as a visual and mnemonic point of departure through which water, stone, distance, and belonging begin to take form within the work — a site where my experience of cultural in-betweenness could be translated into pictorial terms. The sea and stones did not simply represent nature; they offered a way to think through movement, memory, and the unstable condition of belonging.

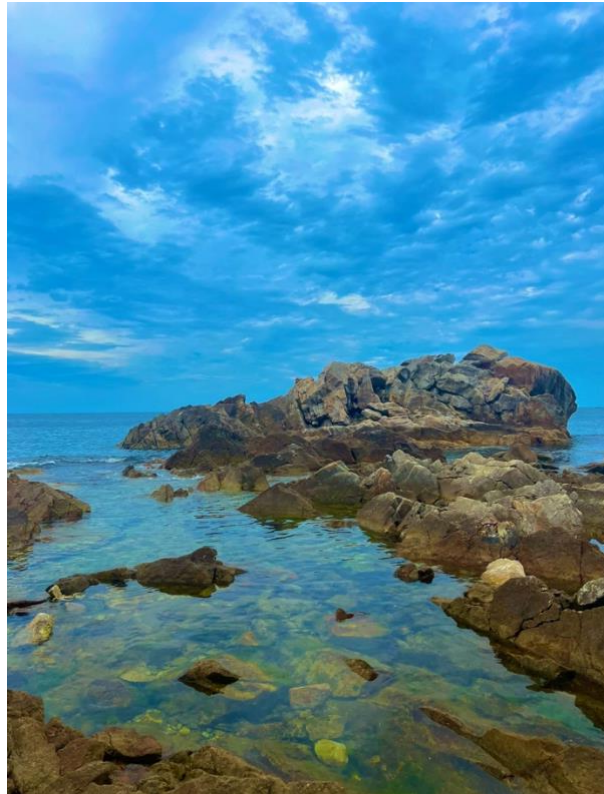


Figure 12. Chaewon Gim, view of a coastal rock formation and tidal pool, Samcheok, Gangwon-do, South Korea, 2022. Photo by artist.

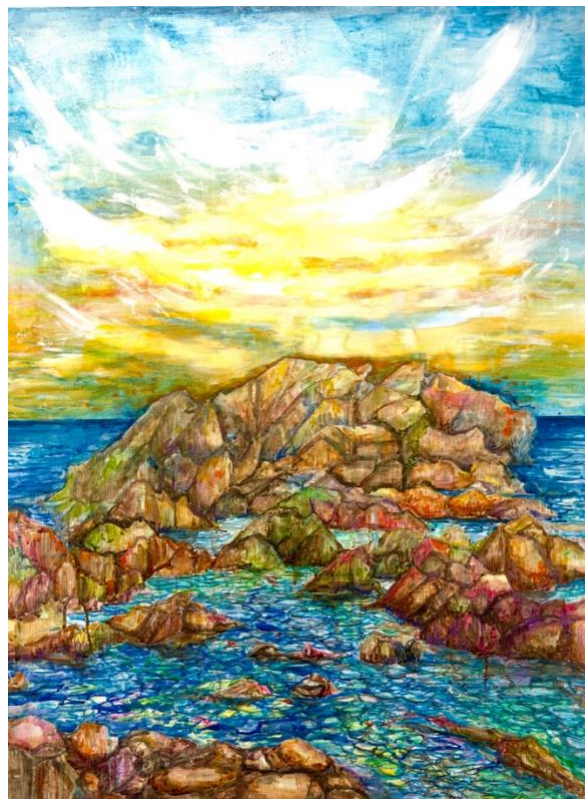


Figure 13. Chaewon Gim, *열두 번의 조수*; *Years, Waves, I*, 2025-2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured

pencil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Photo by artist.

This relationship is especially evident in *열두 번의 조수; Years, Waves, I*, one of the exhibition's largest works and a central painting within the thesis. The work is an abstract painting developed from a photographic reference of Janghohang in Samcheok, South Korea. The photograph is not translated into realistic descriptive landscape. Instead, it becomes a point of departure through which the coastal scene is transformed into layered washes, softened edges, and accumulated marks. The painting draws from the memory of that site rather than reproducing its visual details.

In the painting, sea, land, and stone remain perceptible, but they are not fixed as stable or fully legible forms. They are abstracted through layered transparency, softened edges, and gradual shifts in tonal density. These formal choices begin to unsettle the stability of the landscape while still allowing traces of the original coastal reference to remain visible.

As an early and foundational work in the exhibition, *열두 번의 조수; Years, Waves, I* provides an important ground for the later paintings, which move further toward fragmentation, blur, and spatial disorientation. Unlike many of the works that follow, this painting retains a visible horizon and a more stable spatial order. Its importance, however, lies precisely in this relative clarity. Rather than presenting the full dissolution of pictorial orientation, it establishes the visual and conceptual ground from which the later works begin to depart.

At the same time, the work enacts what might be called a silent performance: the visible accumulation of pauses, returns, and layered adjustments that trace the process of painting itself. The painting does not assert identity through explicit narrative; instead, it registers

identity materially through sedimented surfaces, unstable spatial relations, and the gradual reworking of water and stone. For this reason, *열두 번의 조수*; *Years, Waves, I* functions as an origin point within the thesis. It presents memory in a more recognizable but already abstracted pictorial register before that register is progressively destabilized in the subsequent works. In this way, the painting is not an exception to the exhibition's broader movement toward uncertainty. Rather, it is the work that makes the later transformations legible.

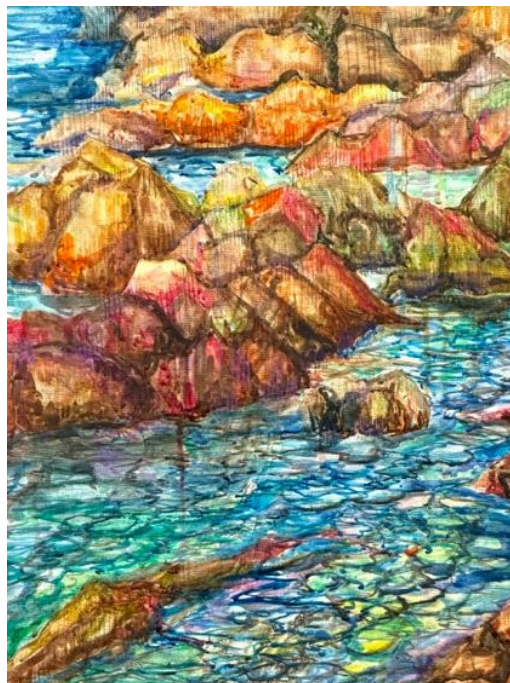


Figure 14. Chaewon Gim, detail view of *열두 번의 조수*; *Years, Waves, I*, 2025-2026. Watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Left panel. Photo by artist.

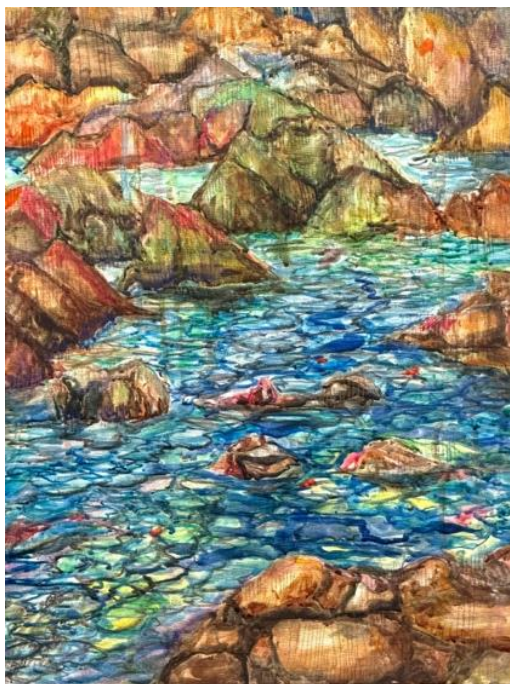


Figure 15. Chaewon Gim, detail view of 열두 번의 조수; *Years, Waves, I*, 2025-2026. Watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Centre detail. Photo by artist.

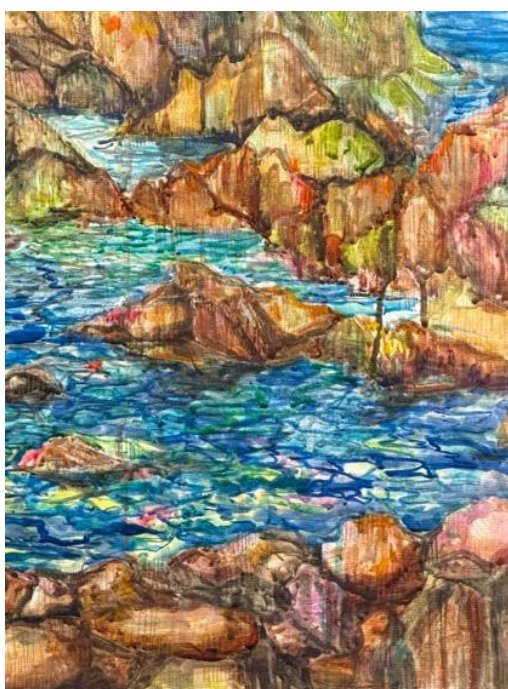


Figure 16. Chaewon Gim, detail view of 열두 번의 조수; *Years, Waves, I* (right), 2025-2026. Watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil on canvas, 48 x 38 in. Photo by artist.

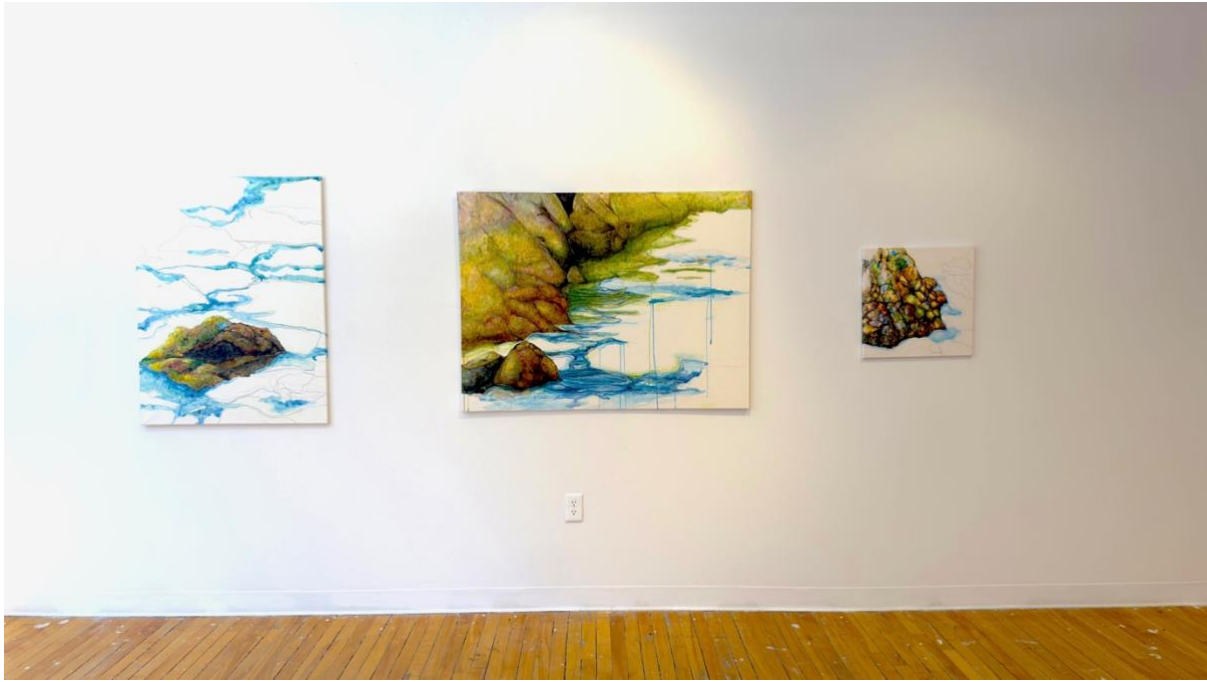


Figure 17. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *고요한 외침; Roar, Echo, Mute*, 2026. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 36 x 30 in (left; *축적된 현존 I; Here, Weight, Layer*. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 36 x 48 in. (centre); and *시간의 섬; Reach, Self, Wander*, 2026. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 18 x 18 in. (right). Photo by artist.

The grouping of *고요한 외침; Roar, Echo, Mute*, *축적된 현존 I; Here, Weight, Layer*, and *시간의 섬; Reach, Self, Wander* develops this relation through formal variation rather than through simple repetition. Installed together, these works allow the viewer to see how the same motif is tested under different conditions of density, proximity, and compression. In *고요한 외침; Roar, Echo, Mute*, the rock-like form remains relatively isolated, with blue intervals circulating around it and preserving a greater sense of openness. In *축적된 현존 I; Here, Weight, Layer*, the central mass becomes heavier and more sedimented; the image appears more compact, and the sense of memory shifts from drift toward pressure. In *시간의 섬; Reach, Self, Wander*, this compression intensifies further, as clustered forms are

pushed into closer adjacency and the available spatial air is reduced. Seen together, the three works demonstrate silent performance as a durational method: each painting records not only an image of stone and water, but also the slow accumulation of pictorial decisions through which memory becomes condensed. Their grouping is therefore significant because it makes visible a gradual movement from openness to compaction, from dispersed relation to layered density.



Figure 18. Chaewon Gim, *고요한 군집*; *Hush, Mass, Cluster*, 2026, watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil on canvas, 12 x 12 in. Photo by artist.



Figure 19. Chaewon Gim, *고요한 군집*; *Hush, Mass, Cluster*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 12 x 12 in. Photo by artist.

The pedestal work, *고요한 군집*; *Hush, Mass, Cluster*, extends these concerns into a more explicitly spatial register. On its upper surface, stone-like units are both separated and linked through blue intervals and fine white lines, producing a field in which division and connection remain inseparable. Installed low at the centre of the room and viewed from above rather than frontally, the work reconfigures the viewer's bodily and perceptual relation to the motif. In this instance, border-translation operates not only within the limits of pictorial space but also as a spatial proposition enacted through installation. The white lines do not simply mark boundaries; they also function as connective structures, allowing separation and relation to emerge simultaneously. As a result, the work can be understood as a fragmentary or compressed spatial analogue of the exhibition's broader formal logic. Its significance lies in the way it condenses the tensions between flow and containment, interval and adjacency, into a single, concentrated field. The work further shifts the logic of horizon removal into sculptural and installation form. Rather than confronting a distant scene, the viewer encounters a compact terrain of unstable boundaries and layered relations.

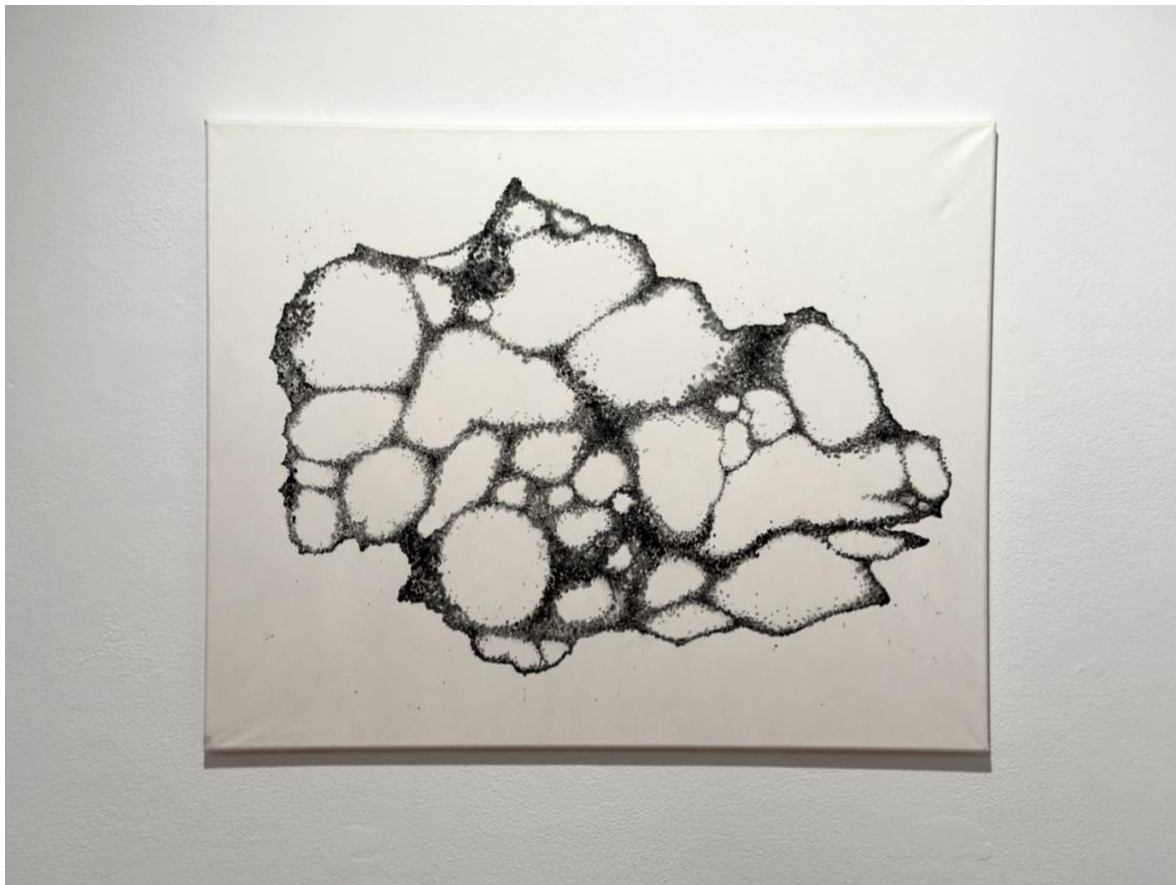


Figure 20. Chaewon Gim, installation view of *유실; Lost, Fade, Gone*, 2026. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 12 × 12 in. Installed in *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory*, 2026. Photo by artist.

A different mode of condensation emerges in *유실; Lost, Fade, Gone* and *개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack*. In *유실; Lost, Fade, Gone*, the image moves away from explicit references to landscape and instead develops into a network of enclosed and adjoining forms. In the relative absence of strong ambient colour cues, the composition relies more heavily on contour, repetition, and adjacency, so that the structural relations between forms become more pronounced. The significance of the work lies not in its depiction of a singular stone-like form, but in the way it stages memory as a clustered system of near-connections, interruptions, and internal tensions. Fine dotted and linear elements introduce a sense of fragility and

withdrawal, suggesting that memory is at once dispersed and tenuously held together. In this way, the painting presents memory not as stable or unified, but as something that persists through delicate acts of spacing, accumulation, and partial connection.

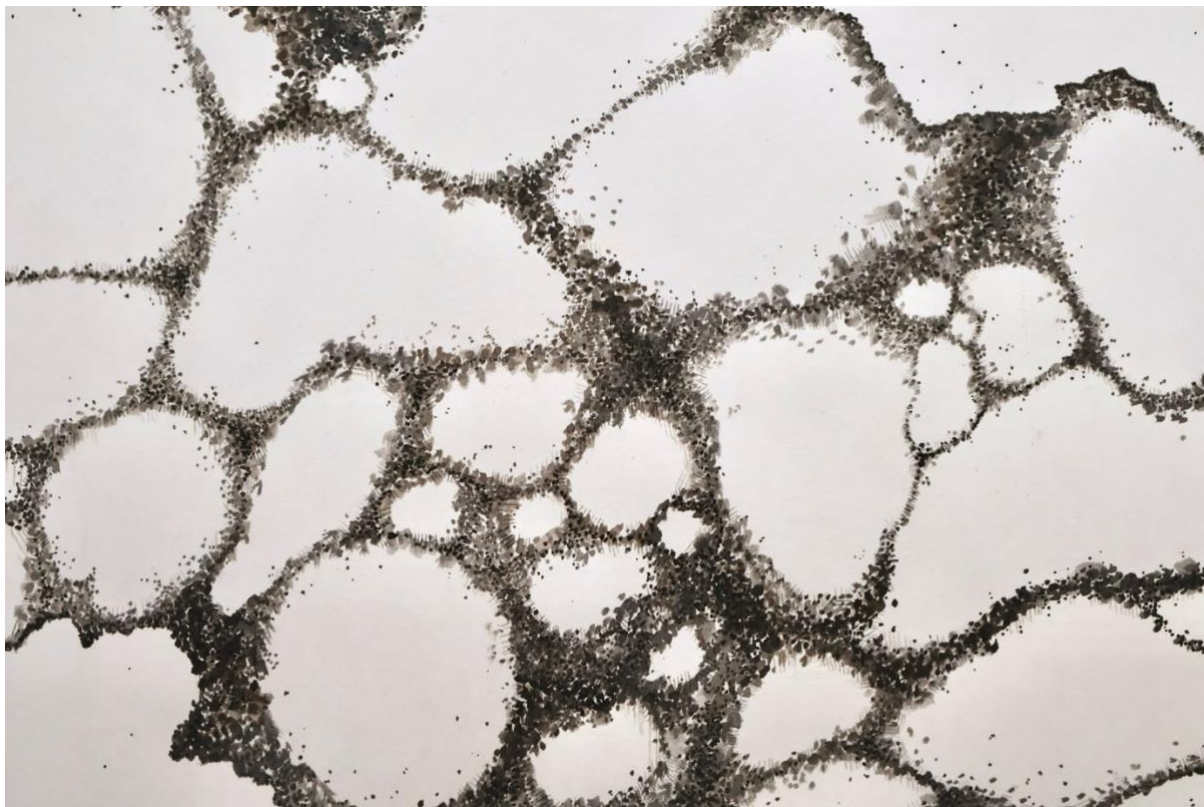


Figure 21. Chaewon Gim, detail view of *유실*; *Lost, Face, Gone*, 2026. Watercolour and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Photo by artist.



Figure 22. Chaewon Gim, *개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack*, 2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Installed in *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory*, 2026. Photo by artist.

By contrast, *개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack* intensifies density and material weight. The central mass appears compacted, swollen, and heavily worked, with multiple colours compressed into a single, concentrated form. Here, the surface suggests not description but pressure: memory is registered as thickness, opacity, and accumulated force. This contrast between the two works is methodologically significant. Whereas *유실; Lost, Fade, Gone* foregrounds the dispersal and instability of memory, *개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack* emphasizes compression, sedimentation, and persistence. Considered together, the two paintings demonstrate that “strata” functions not merely as a geological metaphor, but as a material logic of painting. The image does not literally imitate geological form; rather, it

proposes that memory endures as layered pressure, as the residue of repeated acts of making and reworking.



Figure 23. Chaewon Gim, detail view of 개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack, 2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Photo by artist.



Figure 24. Chaewon Gim, detail view of 개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack, 2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Photo by artist.



Figure 25. Chaewon Gim, detail view of 개인의 지층; Inner, Time, Stack, 2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Photo by artist.

Across these selected works, “strata” emerges not only as a thematic metaphor but also as a compositional and methodological principle. Meaning is produced through layering,

repetition, adjacency, interruption, and the shifting density of the painted surface. In this sense, the concepts—border-translation, silent performance, and horizon removal—are not merely theoretical terms imposed upon the works but are materially enacted within them. Border-translation appears in the unstable negotiation of edges and boundaries. Silent performance is registered through the accumulation of marks, revisions, and returns. Horizon removal operates through the refusal of distant optical mastery and fixed orientation. Water and stone, therefore, do not function as stable symbols attached to pre-existing ideas. Rather, they become legible through the material operations of painting itself, through the ways pigment spreads, settles, thickens, and resists disappearance. In this way, the paintings articulate diasporic memory not as a stable image of origin, but as a field of erosion, persistence, and ongoing re-formation.

3.3 Korean Titles, Opacity and Viewer Encounter

One of the exhibition's most noteworthy achievements is its use of opacity not only in individual paintings but also in the viewer's overall encounter with the space. Édouard Glissant's idea of the right to opacity informs this approach, which opposes the demand that identity, connection, or diasporic experience be entirely accessible to others.⁴⁴ In *Eroded Narrative*, opacity is achieved not through full denial or inaccessibility, but rather through a system of partial access in which the works engage attention without resolving into a singular personal narrative. Language, as well as image and installation, serve to perpetuate this state. The inclusion of Korean titles adds an additional layer of opacity within the exhibition, as meaning is not rendered equally or immediately available to every viewer. Rather than functioning merely as explanatory labels, the titles retain a linguistic and cultural

⁴⁴ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189–94.

distinctiveness that exceeds complete translation, allowing language to participate in the exhibition's framework of partial legibility.⁴⁵

This state is visible in the coexistence of identifiable and unreadable elements throughout the paintings. Some works have enough coastal references for the viewer to recognize rocks, ocean, shoreline, or tidal movement. However, these same works frequently include blurred sections, layered surfaces, and destabilized spatial signals that interrupt descriptive clarity. Other works pare the images down further, emphasizing clustered line, dotted contour, or dense abstract mass over representation. As a result, the exhibition remains sufficiently legible to invite interpretation, while never becoming so explicit that a single reading exhaust it. Opacity therefore becomes active, not as obscurity for its own purpose, but as a visual method for suspending meaning.

Trinh's critique of the tendency to "tell it the way they tell it" is particularly important in this context. Her theory contends that demands for coherence and readability frequently impose an external epistemic framework on actual experience, transforming it into something extractable, classifiable, and controllable.⁴⁶ The exhibition opposes this process.⁴⁷ It does not reduce diasporic memory to a simple explanatory story; rather, it enables memory to remain fragmented, complex, and materially mediated. The Korean titles emphasize the denial of reductive legibility. For Korean-speaking viewers, they may resonate affectively, culturally, or poetically in ways that exceed literal description. For non-Korean-speaking viewers, they remain partially unavailable but not closed. In this sense, the titles do not preclude interaction, rather, they emphasize that encounter can occur without full possession

⁴⁵ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189–94.

⁴⁶ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, 141–143.

⁴⁷ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, 141–143.

or comprehension. This is crucial to the exhibition's viewing ethics.

The physical experience of moving through the gallery reinforces this opacity. As the works are dispersed throughout the room with generous spacing, the viewer must construct relations rather than receive them as fully predetermined. The exhibition cannot be completely understood from a single point of view. Rather, the viewer follows the right side of gallery, first encountering the shoreline painting, then works structured around stone and sea, and finally the stone paintings at the end. This progression structures the exhibition as a sequential and relational method of encounter, compelling the viewer to gaze, connect, and reread throughout the space rather than comprehending the work as a whole. In this regard, it is consistent with Ernest van Alphen's claim that art may perform memory rather than merely reflect it. The viewer is therefore involved in a developing process of interpretation rather than the simple decoding of a fixed message.⁴⁸



Figure 26. Chaewon Gim, photograph of *별이 머문 자리*; *Trace, Warmth, Ray*, 2025. Watercolour, gouache,

⁴⁸ Van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, 163-179.

and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 6 × 6 in. (left), and *이름 없는 섬*; *Without, Nameless*, 2026. Watercolour, gouache, and coloured pencil on Kozuke paper mounted on canvas, 12 × 12 in. (right). Photo by artist.

Opacity also comes from the interaction between scale and proximity. From a distance, the paired works appear to have a common visual language of stone, contour, and coastal shape. A closer look, however, indicates perceptual instability. In the painting on the right, *이름 없는 섬*; *Without, Nameless*, the stone begins to disintegrate into the features of a human face: a chin, a nose, and a pair of lips emerge without becoming fully established. This transition from geological form to corporeal suggestion echoes James Elkins's description of painting's disconcerting intimacy, in which the image gives way to the material substance and instability of paint itself.⁴⁹ The viewer is caught between stone and face, familiarity and ambiguity, image and materiality. Such instability disrupts the ease of narrative consumption, revealing opacity not only as a conceptual argument, but also as an embodied visual experience.

When considered together, the exhibition's visual language, spatial layout, and usage of Korean titles create a mode of encounter founded on partiality rather than full revelation. Opacity here does not simply a breakdown in communication or a disengagement from relationship. Rather, it is an artistic and ethical framework within which diasporic memory may remain complicated, mediated, and irreducible.

3.4 Painting In-Betweenness in the Gallery

The exhibition ultimately transforms the thesis's concept of in-betweenness into a spatial and visual condition. Instead of presenting hybridity through symbolic juxtaposition alone, it

⁴⁹ Elkins, *What Painting Is*, 1-9.

articulates in-betweenness through the relations between wall and floor, abstraction and landscape, line and mass, flow and retention, and recognition and opacity. This condition is methodological as well as thematic. Border-translation is first enacted within the paintings, where edges, forms, and intervals remain in unstable negotiation; the installation subsequently extends this pictorial logic into spatial form through the shifting thresholds between works. Silent performance is registered through the durational accumulation of repeated motifs and painterly returns, while horizon removal is carried into the exhibition as a spatial refusal of any single, stable overview. The exhibition does not simply present works about the Third Space, but instead produces a third-space experience through movement, interruption, and embodied viewing.

This is notably evident in the exhibition's translation between several pictorial states. Some works focus on recognizable coasts and tidal environments, while others explore clustered abstraction or dense suspended shapes. These translations do not read as stylistic inconsistency, rather, they establish a field in which the viewer is continuously confronted with visuals that are neither entirely descriptive nor completely detached from lived reference. This uncertainty is crucial to the exhibition's argument. It suggests that in-betweenness is not an abstract concept external to practice, but something materially enacted in every decision that prevents the work from collapsing into either pure representation or total abstraction.

The gallery environments further reinforces this condition. The works do not occupy the walls as a seamless mural or singular setting; instead, they are individual yet relational, similar to the thesis's conception of identity as layered rather than unified. Their gap between them preserve distinctiveness, yet their recurrent patterns maintain connectedness. This relational arrangement provides gives form to the idea that belonging is neither solitary nor absent, but

rather constructed through incomplete and fluctuating ties. When viewed this way, the exhibition becomes a visual map of “diaspora space,” not in the sense of geographical documentation, but in the sense of a lived terrain structured by memory, tension, and repetition.

The exhibition also demonstrates painting’s capacity as a research-creation method. The gallery does not simply display finished outcomes. It makes visible the conceptual labour carried by material process. Water, blur, contour, density, spacing, and sedimentation do theoretical work because they organize how memory, relation, and identity are encountered. The paintings function not as illustrations of theory but as sites where theory is materially tested. The exhibition confirms one of the thesis’s central ideas that painting is not secondary to thought, but a mode of thought in itself. In-betweenness is therefore understood not only through language, but through looking, moving, pausing, and remaining with forms that never become fully stable or fully transparent.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of Findings

This thesis investigated how painting might be used as a material and intellectual study of diasporic identity, memory, and in-betweenness. *Eroded Narrative: The Strata of Coastal Memory and the Materiality of In-Betweenness* proposes that identity is a dynamic formation shaped by erosion, sedimentation, translation, and repetition rather than a stable origin to be regained or a final destination to be attained. By combining postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, Third Culture Kid discourse, and practice-led research, the thesis argues that painting might explain feelings of hybridity and displacement not just through visual content but also through material process itself. Water, stone, blur, and horizonlessness are not only visual motifs. They become conceptual and methodological instruments for materializing memory and enacting identity in space.

This thesis begins by situating the project within existing literature on the Third Space, TCK identity, diaspora, disorientation, opacity, and materiality. It then defined the theoretical framework by citing Bhabha's description of hybridity and liminality, Glissant's right to opacity, Trinh's critique of legibility, and materialist approaches to artistic production. The discussion then moved on methodology, demonstrating how painting functions in this project as research-creation and how the studio transforms into a site where border-translation, silent performance, and the condensation of memory are enacted through the interaction of watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil, and paper. Finally, the thesis exhibition showed how these concepts are materially evident in the gallery through installation, repetition, interval, and viewer movement.

4.2 Contributions to Contemporary Painting and Diasporic Discourse

Instead of claiming to redefine contemporary painting in broad terms, this thesis makes a more specific contribution by bringing practice-led painting into closer dialogue with scholarship on diaspora, Third Culture Kid identity, opacity, and materiality. As discussed throughout this thesis, much of the literature on diaspora, hybridity, and in-betweenness has been developed primarily through theoretical and textual frameworks. This project addresses that gap by asking what becomes visible when those concerns are worked through the material operations of painting itself. In this thesis, watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil, and paper are not treated as neutral supports for pre-existing ideas; instead, bleeding, layering, sedimentation, horizon removal, and withholding function as methods through which displacement, memory, and partial belonging are examined.

A second contribution lies in the thesis's treatment of opacity in specifically pictorial terms. Existing discussions of opacity, especially in postcolonial discourse, are often articulated at the level of ethics, relation, and political critique. This project does not replace those discussions, but recasts them within a painterly and spatial register. In the works and the exhibition, opacity is produced not through total obscurity, but through partial legibility: blurred transitions, disrupted orientation, Korean titles, layered surfaces, and the refusal of a stable horizon. In this sense, the thesis offers a materially specific account of how painting can sustain relation without full disclosure, and how abstraction can function not as a withdrawal from meaning but as a way of resisting reductive readability.

The exhibition component clarifies this contribution further. Instead of functioning merely as an illustration of the written argument, the installation tests the thesis's concepts spatially through interval, repetition, bodily movement, and interrupted viewing. Its significance lies less in making a general claim about the future of contemporary painting

and more in offering one situated example of how exhibition-based painting can operate as research: not by resolving diasporic identity into a transparent image, but by staging it as layered, partial, and materially negotiated.

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